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ABSTRACT

The author predicts four major trends for residence hall staffs in the years ahead, and describes three major roles which will replace the distasteful disciplinary role of the past. Characteristics of the ideal dormitory counselor are listed. (KS)

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RESIDENCE HALL STAFF -- A NEW ROLE EMERGING?

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Four years ago I stood before a group of hall directors here in Chicago. Many questions were directed to me about women's hours. In 1966-1967, 3 years ago, many of the Big Ten schools began to do away with "closing hours" for women. There were many concerns: has it affected students' grades? Do they keep others awake as they come in? How do you know where students are? Do students sign out? Finally one woman in the back of the room spoke up, "But--what will our jobs be if there are no closing hours for women?"

I recall at about the same time a very fine student personnel intern from our masters program. She had worked in our halls two years, was skilled in counseling abilities, could relate well to students and had excellent ideas for programming. I remember her excitement during spring placement as she accepted her first job. She was excited about the opportunity she had to help open a new hall, a high rise for 550 women. The next year a hall for 550 men would open next door. The facilities were good, her living accommodations excellent, and the students who had met her when she went for an interview gave her a sense of acceptance. She felt she could challenge them to some exciting programs. She had an interest in and a concern for students which she wanted to use in a residential setting.

One November day the following fall she appeared in my office to indicate her desire to change jobs, immediately if possible, and she wanted nothing further to do with residence halls. She could not leave her hall, even with a receptionist on the desk, until she cleared with the Dean of Women. Each morning she was to empty and account for the money in all vending machines, check the man carefully when he came to fill the machines, be sure the drapes in the hall windows were opened and that no beer cans, wine bottles or clothes were to be seen in the windows. She spent a great deal of her time providing weekly written reports to both the Dean of Women and the Housing Director: damage reports, number of women late and the minutes late, summary of judicial board proceedings, etc. She had had little time to work with students, and because of her constant enforcing of "petty" rules which neither the students nor she felt were necessary, she had lost any rapport that she might have had to be of help and challenge to students.

A couple of months ago I visited a campus where there were several residence halls, each housing from 75 to 100 students. There were no residence hall rules nor were there any staff members living in the halls. In fact, I'm rather reminded of the CBS program Family Affair, last Thursday evening when Buffy and Jody were living in "The Land of Do As I Please", for students on this campus could do in their halls as they pleased. Hot plates were allowed and odors of food hit you as soon as you walked into the front hallway. The lounges were DIRTY, guests could live in the rooms or be in rooms at any time. Yet students were moving out of these halls faster than in traditional halls where there is staff, where there is an attempt to hold students accountable for their actions which affect others.

CG 005 760

Somewhere in between must be our residence halls of the 1970's. Students must enjoy living in the halls and, more importantly, they must live there with consideration for one another. They must live in the halls because they want to, not because they have to so that the bond payments may be met.

I am no mind reader, nor am I a fortune teller, but I do see in the 1970's some new roles emerging for the residence hall staff. We must remember that we each work, and the staff for whom we are responsible work, in a college environment. Each of your campuses differ. You must consider your halls, your hall programs, and your staff in relationship to the objectives of your institution and to the needs or interests of the students in your halls. But what will those interests be in 1975 and 1980?

Many of us have only to look back 10 years, back five years, or even only three years and see how rapidly changes have come. Have you talked to a high school counselor recently? Have you really talked to this year's freshman class? Can you predict the students' needs?

I hear that in the future we will have no grades. We won't challenge students by a concern for their GPA. As there are fewer jobs for those with B.A., M.S., or Ph. D. degrees, can we challenge them with the thought of job preparation? What happens when independent study is the way of the academic program? What happens when there are no basic requirements for a degree? Are students self motivated to study? Will the faculty spend their time with them?

I would predict four major trends for residence hall staffs in the years ahead:

1. Fewer, better prepared and better paid staff, staff who are able to challenge students academically.

2. Specialization of functions. It will be essential that we have good business managers, that we have persons skilled in understanding ways of challenging students, and persons who understand the group process.

3. A concern for growth and self-development of individual students.

4. A concern for effective communication between specialized staff; between counseling, programming, physical maintenance and food services.

For years we have been concerned with the staff that worked with students in the living situation. Face it anyway you want: those in this room who have been business oriented and those who have been student personnel oriented know that regardless of how we attempted to phrase or state job responsibilities, those things expected of staff who lived with students could be spelled in capital letters, C-O-N-T-R-O-L, control. Most of us did and do expect staff who live or work with students in the hall to know 24 hours a day what is going on, to provide an environment where students can study, to know the students, to be aware of emotional disturbances, to help plan an educational program, to be always pleasant and friendly, and of course to be a good public relations representative. We have expected the impossible, and people prepared and skilled to challenge students would not stay with hall work.

We have gone in circles as to the type of staff we have used in halls. From the beginning of the days of Harvard, the problems of student conduct in the dining room and the dormitory were the first jobs faculty got rid of and gave to those who have been referred to during the 20th century as the student personnel workers.

Student monitors were first appointed at Harvard in 1655. Other colleges followed their lead and appointed monitors "to report all student misdemeanors, keep records of student conduct and in some cases to collect fines tutors imposed for minor offenses." Student staff provided the same concerns then as today. As one historian stated it, "The student monitors frequently refused to report on their friends and accepted personal punishment rather than tattle on other students."

Most of us have used student proctors, resident assistants, or house fellows for every 25 to 50 students. Have we really taken advantage of the knowledge of peer learning and peer relationships to challenge students? We have used housemothers, but have we expected any more of them than to be there to meet emergencies, to lock doors, to teach social graces or to meet parents? We've used trained professional counselors, but they too often were concerned only with the personal challenge of students and put little effort into out-of-class activities. We've used faculty members, but few would or could combine the long hours of student contact and teaching. We gave the responsibility to the Dean of Men and Dean of Women, but with the coming of the Dean of Students we have turned to a functional staff.

For the most part we use, or have used, the staff WHO WERE AVAILABLE for a job description we felt met the objectives of our halls to meet the needs of students. Everything was all right so long as things ran smoothly. However, as we saw objectives not being met, we realized that too little thought had gone into considering the functions that staff were to perform in relationship to their skills. Just as little thought went into defining these functions in terms of needs of students.

I see the function of the residence hall staff to be three-fold, call them three roles if you wish:

1. To set an environment and challenge students so that they meet their academic goals.

   This responsibility does not mean just "control" of quiet hours, but it implies stimulation of students to take advantage of the many educational opportunities that exist not only on campus but in the community around them. Far too often students sit in their rooms without "a thing to do" when bus trips into nearby metropolitan areas, to a children's hospital, to a nursing home, to a play, to a tutoring program for the inner-city, or attendance at a lecture, could be encouraged through program activities in the hall.

   The staff cannot plan FOR students. We must have staff who are excited about the opportunities for activities they see around them and who can generate enthusiasm from students. Staff must be aware of student interests and concerns and, as a teacher, build on this knowledge to bring about extended learning for students. Students are concerned about our court systems, about our inner-city problems, about pollution.

Last weekend one hall group on our campus had a weekend retreat for 90 students on "Problems of Poverty."

This role means helping the students with study habits, it means helping students to contact faculty, to encourage students to talk with faculty. This implies that there are staff contacts with students in the living situation who know the faculty of the campus community.

This past week I heard young staff asking: Who can talk to students and REALLY explain V.D.? Who can REALLY talk to students about the effect of drugs? Who can serve as a resource person for our Free University session, "Power for Change"?

This academic environment does mean good meals necessary for good health. It means meals served at times that meet students' academic and work schedules. It does mean a place and an environment for sleep. It does mean a clean hall that's pleasant to live in. Students complain about costs, about meals, but what mutual efforts on the part of various staffs and students have been put forth to really understand the rise in the cost of food and the cost of labor?

In assisting students to meet academic needs, it does mean that through individual contacts and small discussion groups students should be helped to find their own sense of identity, to be able to say why they are in college.

It takes a staff with maturity to challenge students, a staff that students respect as having been through some of the same pressures themselves. A few years ago at a summer residence hall workshop the deans asked a student panel to describe the staff member that meant the most to them and why. Two resident assistants were described. Both were older than the average unit staff member. The man was a senior, a straight A physics major. He was 27 and had worked five years for a circus. The woman 26 or 28, she taught physical education. The students expressed in both cases that the R.A.'s liked students, were concerned about what they did, were interested in talking with them. In reality, they were good listeners.

2. A second major role of staff is a counseling one. However, I prefer to use the phrase "challenging of individual students to the end that each develops to his fullest capacity."

It is in the halls that individual students can best be known. Staff must know students, know the characteristics of the young adult with whom they are working. These young adults are not as they were five years ago. It is most difficult for any of us to describe the college student today. All too often we either see them as they are pictured on T.V., the protesters, the draft card burners, those who disrupt the court system; or they are the "responsible" student leaders who come often to our office and may be more like us than like the students. Our students vary; in any one school, regardless of admission policies, students are not alike. Joe Kauffman in The Student in Higher Education, Katz, Kenniston, and other writers, or the NASPA Bulletin, The Student and His Image, all give us some idea of the

young adults who are said to be living in our halls. Students come to college, or did until this past year or so, with an excitement and willingness to do the work demanded of them, but their expectations and performance usually declined very rapidly during the first months of the freshman year. I say did, because criticism of academic programs now begins in the high school.

Residence hall staff must realize the needs of these students and help them, or assist in setting the environment which will aid each individual to his fullest development. Arthur Chickering has defined these areas of development: a) each must develop a competence in intellectual, physical, manual and interpersonal skills; b) each student must learn to manage his or her own emotions; c) each young adult must become autonomous--must be independent; d) each young adult must establish his or her own identity; e) each student must develop a tolerance for a wider range of persons, must develop a trust in persons; f) each student must clarify a purpose of life; and g) students must develop an integrity.

For years we have said to students that it is in the residence hall setting that they have the opportunity to know and work with students who differ from them. The staff must serve as catalyst to bring about interaction of growth value to students.

3. The third role of staff, since students spend on many campuses 80% of their time outside the classroom, and since good mental health is a real concern, is to stimulate and provide leisure time activities--culturally and recreationally.

I do not apologize for this being a role of hall staff. Here as with other tasks, the skill of the residence hall staff is measured in an ability to challenge students to assist one another in meeting these needs. What has taken the place of the Junior Prom, The Winter Carnival? Have we really helped students to find a way to use their energy in helping others? The residence hall is the base for intramural sports, for participation in student union activities and all-campus events such as a Quiz Bowl or a Great Issues Forum.

If students are not to make a living at a job until they are 21-24 years of age, if they are to retire at 55 and live 'til 90 years of age, then they must learn ways of using that "free" time. Golf lessons, Bridge lessons, sailing, tennis tournaments can help develop individual skills.

If the staff in our halls are to perform these roles, setting an environment and challenging students to meet academic goals, assisting each student to develop to his fullest capacity, and providing out-of-class leisure time activities, there are certain characteristics the staff of the 70's must have. Whether the staff in a hall be a "housemother", senior students, professional student personnel staff, or developmental experts, THEY MUST ALL:

1. Be able to relate to the Young Adult who lives in the halls.

You ask students anywhere the kind of staff they want and they will say, one who cares. Somewhere staff must be seen as being there to be helpful, to challenge students and not to serve as Policeman, Judge and Jury. Ideally, students must be challenged to their own sense of self-responsibility. Specialization in discipline will come from separate offices on campus and not from the hall staff; or it will come from the local law enforcement officers.

2. Be intellectually sharp.

We need staff with as broad a liberal arts education as possible, for they must have many ways to relate to many different students. They must be able to hold a conversation on the Chicago Trials with some knowledge of the court system; they must be able to discuss Nixon's veto on the Education Bill as a political action. If the 18 year olds are to vote, if staff is to challenge them, there must be a wide knowledge of social issues and political activity.

3. Be curious about the world around them.

Staff must be as concerned about today's social issues as the students are. They must be concerned about happenings on campus, not as "spies" to pass on the word to the Dean of Students, but so as to challenge students in their actions.

4. Be able to accept social changes, but still be willing to set an environment in which a student can develop as a person with a set of values and attitudes by which he may be a citizen in the world of 2000.

Flexibility must be a rule. Yet staff must have developed their own integrity. We cannot and should not enforce our values on others, but if staff cannot defend their own beliefs, if they have not their own identity, how can they be expected to help the young adult find his?

5. Be able to be creative in bringing about different construction or arrangements in ways of living in our halls.

By rearrangements and varying use of rooms on a floor, much can be accomplished. Some rooms for study; some for sleep; let students move in their own furniture, etc.

6. Be able and willing to make a commitment of TIME to work with students.

Students are busy; their schedules are full. The time they have for activities are usually after 5 p.m. or on weekends. It is often faster for a staff member

> to do a task than advise and wait for students to do the task. Yet that is the nature of the role of an advisor and it does take TIME.

7. Be skilled and knowledgeable about counseling techniques to bring about the fullest student self-development. (Discussed earlier)

8. Be creative in bringing about academically related programs.

9. Be skilled and knowledgeable about the group process to the end that students are able to develop their own community.

10. Be blessed with a sense of Humor.

11. Be skilled and capable of designing and carrying out research.

12. Be willing to accept rewards from seeing students grow from the entering freshman until the staff member works himself out of a job as the senior is ready to make decisions and be responsible and curious on his own.

> The hardest thing is to evaluate what staff do for students. A staff member may spend hours referring a student for help, and if the referral is properly made, the student reports to the health center that he came on his own. If programs and activities of students are successful, students must see if as their program, but more times than not the support, resource and inspiration came from experienced personnel, experienced teachers.

Student attitudes, values, and actions determine our residence hall programs and determine the types of staff we must have available in order to challenge students. No one person or group of persons can hire the personnel staff to work with students and think they have the solutions. There must be a cooperation between business and maintenance staff, between counseling staff and student residents, and with faculty. There must be a mutual respect for what each can contribute to the halls. There must be a mutual understanding of needs of all. We cannot have Faculty Power, Student Power, Dean's Power, or Money Power, if we are to provide residences that contribute to a student's educational experience. If we cannot be concerned about the total student and his education, if we cannot provide staff that can be concerned about students, willing to help students find themselves, then we need to get out of the housing business and let free enterprise run it as they see fit.

The role of the residence hall staff is a changing one and must change. We no longer say, "Do as I say, because I say so." We must be able to help students see Why--as students put it, to see relevance. We must be willing to listen, to change, but at the same time willing to take a stand if that stand is educationally sound.

If we are to do the things necessary in our halls, we must have specialized staff; we must have better prepared staff with job descriptions that they can "LIVE WITH", and we must see that the specialized staff communicates with one another effectively to bring about mutual understanding and respect. This may have to mean fewer staff, for we cannot continue to add cost to staffing.

As we each go back to our own specialized areas, we must realize that Indiana's answers, Colorado's answers may not be for Alma, Guelph, or British Columbia. The facts pointed out here must be related to your own campus through open discussion with all concerned: students, business staff, student personnel staff, and faculty.

Woodrow Wilson said it: "The real intellectual life of a body of undergraduates, if there by any, manifests itself, not in the classroom, but in what they do and talk of, and set before themselves, as their favorite objects between classes and lectures."

Can residence hall staff help to challenge those out-of-class experiences? If YES, we belong in the Housing Business; IF NOT, we should get out.